

The Security Officer

By S. A. Goudsmit

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SOME of my best friends are security officers. I asked one of them to put down on paper his side of the security story. He had no desire to be drawn openly into a controversy and declined my request. Even my threat to write something myself along that line left him unperturbed.

Since I have had some experience with clearance procedures in the AEC, I thought myself qualified for such an assignment. I realize now that I am sticking my neck out and shall probably lose not just some but many of my best friends after they have read what follows.

WHO are our security officers? The few I know about are lawyers who drifted into the security game via war service in military intelligence and counterintelligence.

Others may have had experience with the FBI or other law enforcement agencies. They have seen the seamy side of life, as a policeman observes it. The experienced security men have a way of seeing thru your soul so that it is impossible to hide anything from them. They are practical psychologists, but I doubt whether they ever studied psychology. These are the good ones.

The poor ones are those who like their job, not for its constructive, but for its destructive, qualities.

They enjoy the power of helping to decide who can and who can not be employed, tho they really are not responsible for this nor do they have the last word. They relish the collection of derogatory information; their job is an outlet for their frustrated hatred of men. They are biased against intellectuals and anyone who reads a book.

The first and most natural reaction of the security officer when he meets a case that has some derogatory information is to ask, "Why don't you hire someone else and save a lot of trouble?"

But by now he has learned that this does not go over well with scientists. It has become clear to him that scientists are a rare commodity, that each has a particular quality making him almost unique for the contemplated job and that in science, only a pooling of all new ideas can lead to progress.

Thus, in practically all cases, the security officer will be asked to investigate further and see what he can do to get the scientist cleared even if it takes a year or more. Sad indeed are the few cases where

First of three articles reprinted from a piece thru the courtesy of the April Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Dr. Goudsmit is a distinguished physicist who not only has made a profound contribution to the science of nuclear physics (he is co-discoverer of the so-called "electron spin") but he served also as Chief of a Scientific Intelligence Mission in 1944-45, the purpose of which was to ferret out what the Germans might have accomplished in the field of nuclear fission during the war. He therefore is familiar not only with the problems of the scientist, but also the practical problems of the security officer.

"someone else" with a clean record can be found for if the man with the doubtful record is not offered a classified job he will never get a chance to defend himself and get cleared.

The security office receives all available information about the man in question from the FBI or other investigating services. The staff scans the reports carefully, placing a blue mark in the margin at favorable and a red mark at unfavorable statements.

This is, of course, not completely objective; what is marked as unfavorable may depend upon the opinion of the scanner and is certainly influenced by the newspapers he reads and the general atmosphere.

To determine which of the red-marked information is significant is not an easy task. Very seldom does the security officer encounter a clear-cut case; almost all are borderline cases.

Most often not one of the unfavorable comments is in itself derogatory, but rather the fact that there are so many. In days of fear and outbreaks of "investigations" we find among the derogatory statements items which he would have overlooked in normal times.

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SINCE the security officer is usually under pressure to speed up the case, he often has no other choice than to accept and transmit some doubtful information which he himself feels may be erroneous or irrelevant. It is this circumstance which makes some of the derogatory information appear so preposterous, but it can ultimately be clarified.

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